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President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The President: This morning the Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rakhmonov (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, permit me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to your important post as President of the General Assembly. We are convinced that thanks to your wisdom and experience you will successfully guide the deliberations of this important forum.

Over the past century mankind has made unprecedented strides in its overall progress. It has demonstrated with unprecedented force the creative genius and potential of the human mind. But at the same time, unfortunately, it has highlighted inherent human failings that are the root causes of tremendous social and political upheavals, the further exacerbation of global problems and the emergence of new challenges.

One of the most significant achievements of the twentieth century is the founding of the United Nations, with its indispensable legal framework and mechanisms giving it the tools to organize collective action on the part of States in order to counter current and future threats.

Tajikistan would like to see the strengthening of the United Nations and of its Security Council, as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is extremely timely and useful, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, to rethink philosophically the lessons we have learned in order to define the principal parameters of a future world order and to develop a programme of action to put them into practice.

We see many valuable and mutually enriching ideas in such initiatives as the convening in the year 2000, at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and the millennium summit; the proposal by Russia to elaborate a concept of peace in the twenty-first century; the idea of Iran of a dialogue between civilizations; and the plans of a number of States regarding a culture of peace and other initiatives.

Tajikistan, for its part, intends to continue contributing, insofar as it is able, to this intellectual endeavour aimed at encouraging all States to join their

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efforts and concentrate on the main areas of international cooperation.

Having won their independence eight years ago, the people of Tajikistan have made their choice in favour of democracy. Although our movement towards the reform of the political system and market transformations in the social and political sphere has been seriously tested, despite all odds we have risen to the challenge. Today we can state firmly that we will not veer from the road we have chosen of building a democratic, law-abiding and secular society in Tajikistan.

The most recent proof of this are the results of a popular referendum on amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, held on 26 September last, which have demonstrated growing support for efforts of the Government to establish lasting peace and accord in our country and, on that basis, to build up further civil society and to form stable democratic institutions.

Many States have needed hundreds of years to reach today's level of democracy. Tajikistan, like other new or restored democracies, will have to cover that distance within a shorter period of time while gradually tackling difficult and complex tasks in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas. It is clear that this will require timely, adequate and coordinated support from the United Nations, and we look forward to such support.

I wish to note with great satisfaction that the transitional period provided for in the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan has entered its final stretch. Thus the way towards further strengthening of the fundamentals of peaceful democratic development has now been opened up.

In this context of critical importance, we are looking forward in the next few months to presidential and parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, which we hope will be successful with the necessary assistance from the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Now more than ever before, the peace process in Tajikistan needs active support, particularly material and financial assistance from the international community. We hope to see remedied very soon the situation wherein donor States allocated only a small percentage of funds pledged in response to the appeal made this year by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan. We would like also to express the hope that at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, as in previous years, full support will be forthcoming for the draft resolution on granting international assistance for post-conflict projects in Tajikistan.

The Government of Tajikistan, despite great difficulties, has consistently been implementing a programme of economic reforms in order to create an effective market economy. Step by step, an appropriate legal framework is being set up to provide a favourable environment for the development of small and medium-sized businesses, for foreign investments and for the promotion of market institutions, including in the areas of finance and banking.

The efforts of our Government are being supported by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and a number of other influential and authoritative international financial and economic institutions and agencies. At this new stage of development resulting from the transformation in our economic and political systems, we in Tajikistan are counting on the international community to provide as much support and assistance as it can.

The disparity in the value placed on human life and tragedy depending on whether one is in Europe or elsewhere is cause for profound regret. If a hotbed of tension flares up in Europe, it is contained and eliminated on the double. And this is wonderful. However, it is particularly hard for us to bear given the large-scale conflicts that have been spilling blood in Asia for decades. And is Afghanistan really not a European problem — Afghanistan, whose drugs are destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of unfortunates, including in Europe? Afghanistan is not just Asia's pain and tragedy. It is Europe's, too.

We are extremely perturbed by the continuing intra-Afghan conflict. The international community must take all necessary steps to restore peace in Afghanistan as quickly as possible. It is unthinkable that the 20-year civil war that has already wreaked such irreparable losses on the long-suffering Afghan people should turn into a new 100-year war and continue into the third millennium.

We are deeply convinced that the only way to put an end to the long-drawn-out bloodshed in Afghanistan is through a political settlement to the conflict which would have as its cornerstone the formation of a broad-based Government that reflects and protects the interests of all

political, ethnic and religious groups and strata of Afghan society.

We are sure that the main thrust in any settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan should be towards strengthening the leading role of the United Nations as the key mediator between the parties in restoring peace and achieving national reconciliation: the efforts of other international organizations, and of States, should complement and reinforce the work of the United Nations; they should not be undertaken in isolation from it, much less run counter to it.

In the context of strengthening the central role played by the United Nations in coordinating international efforts with regard to Afghanistan, the "six plus two" group of friends and neighbours must redouble its efforts. We believe that the Security Council should once again very seriously review the situation in and around Afghanistan and that it should take action, including imposing sanctions against those who are violating Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Engulfed in the flames of conflict, Afghanistan is the source of the many dangers, destabilizing the situation in Tajikistan, the whole of Central Asia and far beyond. In the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, active bilateral and multilateral cooperation is under way on countering the penetration from Afghanistan, and the proliferation in our region, of militant Taliban ideology, weapons, crime, terrorism and various forms of extremism.

I wish in particular to stress the seriousness of the drug problem. Specifically, the protracted war in Afghanistan has turned that country into one of the world's main drug centres. The Taliban movement has chosen an extremely dangerous course in turning the territory under its control into a gigantic drug production and distribution factory and warehouse. Also, despite appeals from the international community, this factory of death continues to increase its output.

In this context, I should like to remind the Assembly of the proposal I put forward at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly in June 1998 (A/S-20/PV.2) to create a "cordon sanitaire" around Afghanistan that would put a covering force along the drug routes out of that country. This idea was conceived because, given the current social and economic conditions in our country, it is no simple matter for Tajikistan to guard its 1,500-kilometre frontier with Afghanistan reliably. There is also a trend towards using Tajikistan not only as a transit route for drugs but also as a reprocessing station, and even towards expanding the market with Tajik consumers, all part of the plans of international criminal groups to destabilize the situation in our country. Still, the bulk of the drugs finding their way into our territory is still destined for transshipment to other countries, primarily European ones through Russia and the Transcaucasus. In this sense, the Tajik-Afghan border is the first line of defence for many other States, and the joint efforts of Tajik and Russian border guards to plug the leaks in it are serving the interests of a substantial part of the international community.

We note with satisfaction that our appeal has not gone unheeded and that over the past year there has been a breakthrough in Tajikistan's cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), whose leadership's support for the measures taken by the Government of Tajikistan to combat drug trafficking is becoming ever more active.

Under the agreements and projects reached and developed between the Government of Tajikistan and UNDCP, a number of specific activities are planned to increase the anti-drug capabilities of law enforcement agencies and the military, in particular those operating in areas adjoining the Tajik-Afghan border. An anti-drug agency reporting directly to the President of the Republic has been established. Cooperation between Tajikistan and UNDCP is a shining example of how efforts can be combined in order to fight shoulder to shoulder against one of the most terrible human evils. We are open to this kind of cooperation with all interested States, international organizations and institutions.

The world has recently been witness to brazen acts by international terrorists who are increasingly operating under the banners of political extremism and religious fanaticism. Tajikistan shares the view that the fight against terrorism is one of the most pressing problems facing mankind today. Suffice it to mention the situation in Afghanistan, which confirms that narco-dollars are helping create an environment favourable to terrorism. We condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and deem it necessary to coordinate the actions of the entire world community to eradicate this scourge at the global, regional and national levels. We think it would be useful to convene, under United Nations auspices, a year-2000 conference to decide on joint organized world

action to combat terrorism; this will be discussed at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

Tajikistan has consistently supported United Nations efforts in the sphere of environmental protection. We appreciate the growing United Nations attention to the serious ecological problems facing our country and other States of Central Asia. We hope that the approach of the year 2000, which the United Nations has declared the International Year of Mountains, will help mobilize the international community's potential to help preserve biodiversity and natural mountain ecological systems. This is of particular importance to Tajikistan as a predominantly mountainous country.

We note with satisfaction that the leadership of the Secretariat, in particular Under-Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello, is showing increasing interest in cooperation with our country to ward off the threat of a major natural disaster in the Central Asian region related to the problem of lake Sarez.

In this context, we believe it is time to focus world attention on the question of fresh water in all its aspects. Therefore, Tajikistan has proposed that 2003 be declared the International Year of Water. This initiative is prompted by the menacing deterioration of a situation in which millions of people lack access to clean water. It is well known that because of water pollution half of the world's population lives in unsanitary conditions; more than 5 million people a year die, and more than 3 billion become ill. As the population increases, the likelihood of "water wars" between States for sources of fresh water grows ever greater. Issues of water and other challenges of the new age are thus directly linked to problems of security in the context of interdependence.

In addition to its humanitarian aspects, the problem of water has other dimensions, in particular economic and ecological ones. Water is our common heritage, and it is necessary to ensure that all States share in the responsibility to preserve it for the benefit of future generations. Constructive global cooperation could become a worthy political dimension of the twenty-first century, and could guarantee that this will never acquire a military aspect.

We hope that the international community will respond favourably to our initiative on the resolution of water problems, which are of crucial importance not only for Tajikistan, which is rich in water resources, but also for the majority of other States Members of the United Nations.

It is vital to repair broken links and to create a new model for relations, particularly in the area of transport and communication. Addressing that key task will to a large extent determine the development in the next millennium of all Central Asian States that lack an outlet to the sea; these include Tajikistan.

My people has drawn new strength from peace and stability. The construction of a railroad, industrial enterprises and social infrastructure is now under way along the ancient historic Great Silk Road, which runs through the territory of Tajikistan. This year we are completing construction of a transboundary route that will give us access to the sea. That is our contribution to restoring direct communication among individuals and peoples along an ancient route that in the Middle Ages served as a bridge between East and West and that made possible dialogue among civilizations.

We expect that in the near future goods will flow along this route in both directions. This will undoubtedly foster better mutual understanding among all peoples of the East and the West, and also will have a positive effect on strengthening regional security and cooperation among neighbouring countries in Central Asia.

Experience has shown that turning to one's own roots is always a powerful means of spiritual therapy, especially for those who have overcome the tragedy of a fratricidal war and are entering a period of active post-conflict reconstruction. Now we are at the stage of renewal and of building a new democratic society, and we look back once more at our long history. At a time when, with active support from the United Nations, the process of national reconciliation is nearing its objective, our country is celebrating the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of the State of the Samanids, which marked the birth of Tajik statehood. We express our appreciation to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and to all the States and international organizations that responded to our appeal and have supported efforts to undertake international activities devoted to this momentous anniversary.

The age of the Samanids was not only a time of an unprecedented flourishing of science, culture and philosophy and of the emergence of Tajik statehood. It was also the time of the birth and blossoming of the mediaeval humanism that so enriched world civilization.

Allow me to express the hope that in the third millennium, now so close, the humanistic ideals will illuminate for the world community the arduous road to universal peace, sustainable development and peaceful construction.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Tajikistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I next give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Botswana, His Excellency the Honourable Lieutenant-General Mompati Merafhe.

Mr. Merafhe (Botswana): I take great pleasure in congratulating you most warmly, my dear brother, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Your great country, Namibia, and its illustrious leader, President Sam Nujoma, have been very generous indeed in allowing us to benefit from the prodigious knowledge and experience you command on the workings of the United Nations, having spent the better part of your life in this institution. We are confident that under your seasoned leadership the fifty-fourth session will serve as a fitting climax to a tragic century. My delegation is ready to render you all the support you will no doubt need in carrying out your onerous responsibilities.

Your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, has earned our admiration and gratitude by the exemplary manner in which he presided over the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We thank his country, Uruguay, for allowing us to tap his wisdom and benefit from his leadership skills.

Our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his team in the Secretariat have continued to discharge their responsibilities with unstinting devotion. The problems they have to deal with, and/or seek solutions to, are enormous, and yet they remain undaunted. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude.

We warmly welcome in our midst three new members of our Organization, Nauru, Kiribati and Tonga. We wish them the best and assure them of our friendship and solidarity.

Despite the many horrors of the twilight of this turbulent century — the civil wars, the rampant terrorism in many places and other acts of savagery committed against millions of our fellow human beings all over the world — we have made commendable progress in the past few years in the maintenance of global peace and security and the consolidation of freedom and democracy. An increasing number of the world's nations have organized successful elections in the past few years, many with the help of the United Nations. In two weeks' time, my own country, Botswana, will for the seventh successive time in a generation afford its citizens another opportunity to exercise their democratic right to choose their leaders.

Political pluralism may not have taken root in all the corners of the globe, but it has undoubtedly enthralled the imagination of all peoples yearning for freedom. It has become the weapon of choice, a powerful one at that, against tyranny. Democracy is, of course, not necessarily a foolproof panacea against all the societal imperfections that are our natural inheritance as human beings, but we believe that only in societies where the rights of all citizens, their fundamental freedoms, their beliefs, their culture, are protected and allowed the fullest expression possible under the law, can peace prevail. Peace is a prerequisite for development, for sustainable development.

At independence in 1966 Botswana was regarded, and rightly so, as an abject basket case, the poorest of the poor of the emerging African nations. Our desire to be free in those inauspicious economic and political circumstances was derided by those who did not wish us well as nothing more than a suicidal wish.

Today, a mere generation later, my country prides itself on having one of the fastest growing economies in the world, thanks to the peace and stability we have enjoyed since independence and the wise utilization of the few resources with which our desert- scarred and drought-prone country is, thankfully, endowed.

Democracy has been a way of life and second nature to Botswana. We attribute our peace and stability to it. We cannot, of course, forget the support we were given by the international community, particularly during the early years of our independence.

This is why we welcome the end, at long last, of military rule in Nigeria, a country whose importance to our continent and to the world at large cannot be gainsaid. A vibrant democracy in Nigeria will have a powerful effect not only on the west African region, but also on the continent as a whole.

We pledge our support to our Nigerian brothers and sisters in their struggle to nurture their democracy and to reconstruct their economy as well as to rehabilitate their institutions. We reiterate our aversion to coups and military rule, and laud the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Algiers decision to the effect that from now on those who overthrow Governments by means other than democratic elections will face isolation by our African community.

We welcome the signing in Togo recently of a peace agreement between the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone and the rebels. We understand fully the circumstances which compelled President Kabbah to sign this peace agreement. We hope the agreement will bring peace to Sierra Leone. We urge the international community to contribute generously to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of that devastated country.

The Great Lakes region in Central Africa remains unstable, despite the signing recently of an Agreement to end the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The signing of the Agreement by its Government and its Southern African Development Community (SADC) allies and the rebels is the first step in a difficult journey to peace in Central Africa.

The Agreement will, however, amount to nothing without the full support of the international community, in particular that of the United Nations. We therefore urge the Security Council, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to become actively involved in the full implementation of the Lusaka Agreement. Time is of the essence.

The case of Angola is a very sad one. The departure of the United Nations from that war-ravaged country has left a void, which has abetted one of the deadliest conflicts that has ever afflicted Africa. In the absence of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission, it is not possible to assess accurately the magnitude of the slaughter, the starvation and the general mayhem caused by disease and landmines in Angola. Nevertheless, we call upon the international community to intensify its efforts to end the tragedy, and we firmly believe that the tragedy can be ended only by the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

We further call upon those among us who continue to give Savimbi's rebellion sustenance to cease doing so. We must all cooperate in ensuring that sanctions imposed against UNITA are effective.

We welcome, in this regard, the Security Council's recent establishment of panels to investigate violations of the sanctions imposed against UNITA and to find effective ways of tightening them. It is our fervent hope that the panels will not only be able to reveal the identities of UNITA's merchants of death, but will also advise on how such violators of United Nations sanctions could be deterred from defying the will of the international community.

The bloody war that has been raging between the East African neighbours of Eritrea and Ethiopia may be experiencing a lull as we meet here, but the fact, in our view, continues to be that this terrible war does not make sense. It is a war of brothers who, more than anyone else, should have found it easy to sit down to discuss whatever differences might have arisen between them. We urge our two fellow African countries to embrace each other under the OAU-brokered peace agreement and to make peace.

The question of Western Sahara has been on our agenda for too long. We urge the parties to redouble their efforts to conclude the identification process so that a referendum can be held to decide the future of Western Sahara once and for all, as called for by the OAU summit in Algiers.

The decision by Indonesia last year to allow the people of East Timor to decide their future as they saw fit was hailed by my country — and, I am sure, by many others across the globe — as a momentous and wise one. We lavished praise on Indonesia for this decision, fully conscious of the fact that it could not have been an easy one to make.

The decision was quickly followed by the equally momentous Agreement signed in May this year between the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal, on one hand, and the United Nations, on the other, by which the people of East Timor were to decide their future through a referendum. We were therefore disappointed, to put it as mildly as I can, by the tragic events that followed the holding of the referendum. The unleashing of militias on

an innocent population — which had, with so much dignity and calm, voted in a referendum, as invited to do by Indonesia and the United Nations — deeply disappointed Indonesia's friends, including my own country. The destruction of Dili, the capital of East Timor, and its environs by the militias ennobled no one, including Indonesia, and deserves our censure.

Now that the East Timorese have unequivocally stated their preference, which is independence, they should be afforded all the assistance they need to fulfil their national aspirations without hindrance. Relations between the soon-to-be independent State of East Timor and the Republic of Indonesia should be cordial, and it is our hope that this will be the case.

The resuscitation of the Wye River Memorandum and its implementation recently have given a needed fillip to the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This gives us hope for the final phase of the negotiations that have just begun. We urge the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians to persevere in the quest for peace in the Middle East.

In the past few years we have witnessed a proliferation of summits and major conferences aimed at building a consensus on issues as diverse as women and development, youth, the environment, human rights, population and social development, human settlements, education and health. We have also convened conferences to address the dangers of weapons of mass destruction and to intensify the campaign against landmines. If summitry and conferences alone were the solution to the world's ills, our planet would by now have become a wonderful place to live. But this is not at all the case.

The cold war may have ended, but the old danger or threat posed to the security of humankind by weapons of mass destruction remains. This is, as always, exacerbated by the build-up of conventional weapons beyond the legitimate requirements of self-defence. Once again we urge those concerned to show political will and commitment by taking progressive measures to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating them.

The adoption by the OAU of the Pelindaba Treaty and the establishment of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone has demonstrated Africa's commitment to an early conclusion of a legally binding instrument to avert the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. We will continue to work assiduously with our partners in the developing world to pursue efforts aimed at ridding the southern hemisphere of all weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

Landmines have continued to maim and kill innocent people. We must redouble our efforts to ban their production, stockpiling and use. We must all become party to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

The challenges of development have become more formidable in today's globalizing world. Increased integration of markets and the rapid transfer of technology and of other innovations, as well as a wide array of economic, social and political relationships, band our nations together and dictate a common destiny for our peoples. To survive the global competition, we in the developing world must timeously and adequately respond to the opportunities and challenges facing us. In order to do so we need to vigorously pursue strategies that will increase trade prospects. We need also to raise the productivity of our labour force and the quality of our human resources. It is crucial that in our pursuit of sustainable economic development, the basic tenets of democracy and good governance be upheld at all times and never be sacrificed.

At the Algiers summit of the OAU, our leaders had substantive discussions on how to harness the forces of globalization for the benefit of the African region and for the prosperity of our peoples. They solemnly committed themselves to striving to ensure that globalization does not transform Africa into a marginalized bystander. We recognize, however, that to move forward, the entire international community has to be fully engaged. This would by no means be merely a charitable act, but rather an investment in global peace and security.

The United Nations, as a universal forum, is uniquely placed to promote international cooperation by addressing the challenges of development in the context of interdependence. However, this can be achieved only if the United Nations is provided adequate financial resources. We note with deep concern that the last five years have seen a steady decline in the resources of the United Nations Development Programme, the leading operational arm of the United Nations.

Far too many of our people live in abject poverty. Far too many die of preventable diseases such as

tuberculosis and malaria. Unemployment remains pervasive, especially among the young.

Africa's economic recovery and growth potential continue to be frustrated by the mounting foreign debt. Despite the numerous relief efforts, a durable solution to the problem has remained unattainable. My delegation acknowledges the efforts being made through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative in 1996. But while the HIPC Initiative can be a catalyst in the search for the solution, it cannot be the solution itself. To reach the heart of the debt problem, it is imperative that the debtors and the creditors acknowledge the seriousness of the problem and work together to strike a compromise that could yield long-term results.

We appreciate the efforts being made by the Bretton Woods institutions and the donor Governments to address the debt problem, particularly the seminar recently held in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, chaired by the President of Botswana, Mr. Festus Mogae, whose results we hope will be followed up. We still believe, however, that the permanent solution to Africa's debt problem should go beyond the mere rescheduling of the debt-payment period to outright cancellation and debt forgiveness.

The alarming rate of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is undoubtedly the most worrisome and urgent problem facing sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana being one of the hardest-hit countries. My Government is responding with an aggressive national information and education campaign to combat this destructive disease. The achievements made so far in the health sector and the economy are in jeopardy.

The advancement of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against them in many societies are yet to be achieved. Women and young girls are still subjected to all manner of brutalities.

The plight of millions of children who are conscripted into armies in various parts of the world is an outrage. The images of children being conscripted and trained to participate in senseless wars caused by the folly of adults dehumanizes us all. Everything must be done to discourage this evil practice and to punish those who insist on perpetrating it. The Government of Botswana fully supports the work of the Special Representative of General Assembly for Children and Armed Conflict and remains fully committed to upholding all the international legal instruments on the rights of children. My delegation attaches great importance to these issues and urges the community of nations here gathered to join their efforts in the search for solutions to these socio-economic problems.

In turning now to the reform of the United Nations, let me briefly say the following: A wise man adapts to circumstances, as water shapes itself to the vessel that contains it. So says a Chinese proverb. That the United Nations, particularly its Security Council, needs to adapt itself to the era in which it exists today, I think is axiomatic. The fact that the Security Council's undemocratic composition is an insult to the overwhelming majority of the Members of this Organization is also, I think, self-evident and recognized as such even by those who would, if allowed, keep this important organ as it is.

Africa, demands to be properly represented in the Security Council in both categories of representation. We will never tire of insisting on our demand for three additional non-permanent seats and at least two permanent seats.

Let me conclude by once again wishing you well, Sir, in your tenure of office as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We can assure you that our commitment to the United Nations remains as strong as ever. This Organization, I am sure we all agree, is irreplaceable.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Bolivia, His Excellency Mr. Javier Murillo de la Rocha.

Mr. Murillo de la Rocha (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The men of the Andes scrutinized the skies to decipher and predict the future. If they were looking at the skies today, they might not manage to understand the message written there. On the one hand, there is the promise of unlimited prosperity, with man in apparent control of nature and his environment, thanks to the outstanding strides made in knowledge, the tireless flow of data and financial resources, the almost genetic transformation of the means of transportation and communication, the growing empire of freedom and the reaffirmation of democratic values on a global scale.

On the other hand, however, the new millennium is arriving with disquieting signs. Financial crises are increasingly frequent and ever more acute. The gaps between the haves and the have-nots are widening. Confusions, fear and uncertainty prevail over a large part

of the planet. Thus must one see both sides of globalization: one of promise, the other of threat.

The effects of the two aspects of the process are felt in Latin America with singular intensity. The crisis of the financial markets and the constant decline in commodity prices have struck at the heart of the economies of our societies and subjected them to pressure, in some cases intolerable. Nothing seems to be in its place and few dare to anticipate the future.

Nevertheless, the men and women of Latin America have a right to keep hoping. My own country maintains a very cautious optimism. Not many years ago, Bolivia felt with particular intensity the tragedy that is affecting other nations of Latin America. Drug trafficking, the external debt, the collapse of mining and the crisis in the political system all conspired to create a picture of confusion and anguish that seemed to be insurmountable.

What we have done since then belongs to history. I shall summarize it here for no other reason than to share our experience, because our task, far from over, seems to have only just begun.

Tired of sterile and debilitating political confrontation, Bolivians decided to take the road of cooperation and dialogue. The coalition Governments on which the political system has been based and nurtured since the early 1980s proved the intelligence of an old constitutional norm, but they also showed that the letter of the law is worthless if it is not steeped in the spirit in which it was written. It was in the spirit of questing for consensus that the political Constitution was reaffirmed, the true independence of the National Electoral Tribunal was guaranteed and the Constitutional Tribunal, the Judicial Council and the Office of Ombudsman were established. Lastly, institutions and social organizations were incorporated into the discussions of the major problems affecting the nation in a dialogue that President Hugo Banzer, at the start of his mandate, called on to support the Government's work with a broad civic consensus.

Mr. Morel (Seychelles), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this rapid summary is that the economy cannot be modernized without a solid base of political reform. Indeed, it was on that political foundation, on the basis of the will of the people represented by the parties, that we were able to make strides in modernizing and opening up the Bolivian economy. We controlled inflation. We renegotiated and reduced the external debt burden. We transferred control of public companies to the private sector, and we created the conditions for the sustained development of Bolivia.

However, when we seemed to be achieving the impetus required to launch that development, the Asian crisis and its effects on our region abruptly slowed down the rate of our growth, after almost a decade of a modest increase in per capita income. The storm will pass, undoubtedly, but I cannot deny that the legitimate expectations for development have been affected by this sudden and unexpected return of old fears.

We know how Bolivia managed to control its economy, and you have already heard the figures that show how the reserves grew, the way the fiscal deficit was reduced and the mechanism that enabled us to go from an inflation rate of more than 20,000 per cent per year in 1984 to 4 per cent in 1998, just to mention the most significant data.

But there are other things that are sometimes overlooked. One is that the process of structural transformation requires perseverance and time. Bolivia persevered, perhaps because it had had difficult experiences. Nevertheless, more than a decade was necessary to come out of that emergency situation. The other element is that what was built in years of sacrifice can be lost in a moment of inattention or rashness.

With all the limits and difficulties that were involved in the transition process that began in the early 1980s, the living conditions of Bolivians improved significantly, as we see in the data that was published in the last United Nations Human Development Report. Public spending on education increased from 2.1 per cent of the gross domestic product in 1985 to 5.6 per cent in 1997. Illiteracy in young people under 15 years of age was practically eradicated. Between 1976 and 1997 the mortality rate of breast-fed infants dropped from 144 of every 1,000 live births to 69, and life expectancy grew from 45 to 61 years of age in the same period. However, we have to say that the growth rate is still insufficient and unfair.

As in other countries, development was focused on a particular segment of Bolivian society. Therefore the fight against poverty is the main task of the Government of President Bánzer. Thus the cornerstone of that strategy is the active participation of the very sectors that had been ignored in choosing ways and means through an

intelligent and active decentralization mechanism. There is full awareness that access to the means of production should be added to the effort that has already been made in allocating resources to social, educational and health policies.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when we began the democratic stage I have just described, illicit drug trafficking cast a long shadow over development in Bolivia. At the critical moment of the collapse of tin mining, the cultivation of coca leaves employed thousands of families of unemployed workers and became a major source of income for the Bolivian economy. Even worse, however, was that the risk that drug trafficking would infiltrate the economic and political system became a real possibility.

The situation today is radically different. Bolivia will emerge from this coca-cocaine cycle in the next three years, within the timetable President Bánzer set for himself when his mandate began in the face of the scepticism of all, friends and critics.

In August 1997, the land occupied by coca plantations exceeded 40,000 hectares. In the 25 months of the implementation of the Dignity Plan, 25,000 hectares have been removed and the remaining 15,000 will be eliminated in the time-frame planned, or earlier. The undeniable success of that plan can be explained by the conviction of the Bolivian people that the drug-trafficking cancer had to be eradicated from the body of national society.

President Bánzer had the merit of interpreting that decision and of making it concrete, making it an irrevocable State policy. He applied it without altering even a millimetre of the structure of democratic institutions and without breaking the spirit of civil peace and security which my country fortunately enjoys. The occasional moments of friction that arose in the beginning were brought under control, and the police forces were required to carry out their tasks with the utmost respect for human rights.

The international community has pointed to the Bolivian strategy as one of the most successful and pragmatic ones of the continent. I must say, nevertheless, that the task has not been completed, and its support is essential to create sources of work and productive and legal development opportunities for the farmers who are no longer involved in the cultivation of coca leaves. Only in that way can we claim victory.

The century ends in Latin America with the good news of the peace agreement between Ecuador and Peru and the announcement that very soon Chile and Peru will end years of patient work in order to resolve the matters pending from the 1929 treaty. These are very important events, to which we must add the treaties through which Argentina and Chile resolved their disputes along their extensive border. In that way, the countries of this part of South America altered the legacy of confrontation and conflict that men of other times and circumstances left behind.

However, there is still an open wound in the conscience of America, the injustice of the landlocked situation of Bolivia, which has existed for more than a century. Members know very well how Bolivia lost the extensive coastal strip that it enjoyed when it achieved independence and the enormous cost that loss represents for the development of my country. It is, undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for Bolivia's backwardness, as I pointed out in my message last year with more detail and precision.

I can affirm that my country has made all possible efforts to find a friendly and peaceful solution to its landlocked situation. We have left no stone unturned in every forum in which Bolivia participates. We uphold our request for sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean in irrefutable legal, historical, political and economic arguments.

With ever greater dedication and perseverance, my country sought contact and direct negotiations with Chile in order to find within dialogue a friendly solution that would meet the needs of both countries. In the twentieth century alone, we began at least five bilateral negotiations. Unfortunately, none were successful, for reasons which I do not have to point out now. I mention them only to show that this path has been explored with the support of countries friendly to Chile and Bolivia, and that Chile formally agreed to grant Bolivia a sovereign outlet to the Pacific Ocean and that route is known.

Now, at the threshold of a new century, Bolivia has decided to insist on calling for direct dialogue, a dialogue which would encompass all the themes in our relations with Chile. I trust that very soon we will define, with Chancellor Valdés, the terms of that dialogue, which, in my opinion, should encompass the complete range of our relations and identify ways for the economic, cultural and political cooperation which will unite our nations when

Bolivia recovers its maritime attribute. The experience of the past does not discourage us. New times, new men, new realities must bring along with them new solutions. That is our hope.

The United Nations system, one of the most important creations of the century, is at the threshold of a new millennium and is subjected to many tensions. Its function as a channel for official development assistance has remained constrained by the privatization of financing and technology groups which go from advanced countries to emerging markets.

Its role as a forum for negotiation and dialogue between the North and the South and between developed countries and developing countries is being disregarded for a new and different structure which revolves around essentially technical mechanisms, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, in which negotiations are different from what they were in the past. Its very role as a collective security system sometimes seems at times eclipsed by the unilateral action of countries or groups of countries intent on making their agenda prevail over the world mechanism.

I mention these changes here simply as an argument in support of the need to think about the reform of the system, as a process of creating it anew, and not simply an attempt to stop the clock because of a nostalgic vision. I am convinced that this is the view of the statesmen who represent the United Nations and whose patient yet persevering work will bear fruit sooner rather than later.

Bolivia, of course, as always, is ready to make its firm contribution.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Malawi, His Excellency The Honourable Brown Mpinganjira.

Mr. Mpinganjira (Malawi): The President of the General Assembly has assumed the mantle of leadership at a critical time, as we are about to enter the new millennium. We are about to leave a century which has revealed positive and negative aspects of the human experience. On the negative side, the century has been characterized by colonialism, armed conflict, racism and racial discrimination, apartheid, dictatorship, the Holocaust, genocide, ethnic cleansing, religious intolerance and other forms of evil. In their wake many people, particularly women and children, have lost their lives and have been maimed, traumatized, dehumanized, displaced and forced to seek refuge. Poverty and underdevelopment have wreaked havoc.

On the other hand, humankind has demonstrated a sense of magnanimity in overcoming suffering and despair. We have made very strong efforts to wipe out slavery, colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid. We have striven, through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, to promote the togetherness of humankind and improve the well-being of all. We realize, however, that there is a lot more that can and must be done.

As this century comes to a close, Mr. Gurirab's leadership as President of the General Assembly, and his country, Namibia, represent a beacon of hope for the future. His qualities as an outstanding diplomat, freedom fighter and consensus-builder are all well known to us. My delegation wishes him well as he discharges his heavy responsibilities and leads this esteemed Organization into the new millennium.

In today's globalized world, the challenges are many and the opportunities are manifold. With the same spirit that has enabled us to surmount hurdles in the past, together we can make the twenty-first century a century for the prosperity of all. The groundwork, the foundation for all this, exists. To give credit where it is due, despite many weaknesses, humankind has never been wanting in ideas. The standard-setting strides and intellectual innovations of this century, particularly since the formation of the United Nations, could have been more appreciated if only an extra effort had been exerted towards implementation. Indeed, the twenty-first century should focus on the implementation and concretization of the ideas that have made this century worthwhile.

The consolidation of human rights, good governance and human development seems to my delegation a useful point of departure. The country that I represent was for a long time under a dictatorship. The people of Malawi suffered and know what it means to be deprived of freedom. They are well aware of the impact that denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms has on governance and development. To us the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are not optional, but essential prerequisites for the well-being of humankind.

Human rights are universal and indivisible. They are inalienable. When the people of Malawi went to the polls in June this year, in the second democratic elections, we

confirmed our desire to strengthen further the democratization processes that we started in 1994. The entrenchment of democracy in Malawi has given our people an opportunity to foster unity and common understanding. We now have an environment conducive to exploiting our full potential and maximizing our contributions to the developmental efforts that the Government is pursuing. We wish for all people of the world, regardless of their origin, the same opportunity to enjoy the rights and freedoms that Malawians are proud to enjoy today.

Unfortunately, the situation globally does not give cause for optimism, and there is no room for complacency. Inasmuch as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set forth the yardstick of common achievement and has given rise to numerous subject-specific binding instruments, every effort should be made to assure their effective implementation. The rights of women, children and the disadvantaged, especially, must be given their fullest practical meaning.

As we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, we should reaffirm our commitment to take all practical measures to eliminate discrimination against women and review all practices that impede the mainstreaming of gender in all our developmental endeavours. Malawi welcomes and looks forward to the review conference of the Beijing Platform for Action next year. It is our belief that gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century are achievable.

Almost 10 years ago, world leaders assembled in this very Hall for the World Summit for Children. They made groundbreaking commitments to reach certain goals by the year 2000. The State of the World's Children 1999 report, however, indicates that the benchmarks set are far from being realized. Meeting the commitments of the 1990 Summit remains one of the challenges that we all face at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The continued recruitment and use of children as soldiers in most of today's conflicts is a major source of worry. The use of children as child labourers and in prostitution is also cause for serious concern. We remain convinced that investing in children means a secure future for us all.

Many other conferences have also taken place — particularly during this last decade — including those in Paris, Vienna, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Cairo and Copenhagen. In all these conferences, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms has been a recurrent and cross-cutting theme. Malawi fully supports the outcome of these conferences.

The time has come to make good the pledges that we made: personal liberties for all, particularly women and children; social development, especially for the least developed countries; protection of the environment; provision of food and shelter; jobs and income; education for all; and secure health, including reproductive rights, remain the core of human security. Indeed, these conferences have brought to the fore the interlinkages between the protection of human rights and the questions of good governance and development. Quite often, they seem to give rise to conflicting interests; we aspire to a rights-based approach to development, yet the facts are stark: how can our countries, particularly those with fragile economies such as our own, ensure strong public policies aimed at promoting food security, for example, when the very interventions intended to provide incentives for local production and distribution are put into question by our efforts to spur economic growth? How do we give priority to public expenditures for basic social services such as education, health and water when these are the first to be cut in an effort to meet structural adjustment conditionalities and the demands of debt servicing?

The challenge for us all is to minimize conflict and aim to strike an appropriate balance to ensure proper services that are human-rights compliant. Malawi supports the statement in the United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report* 1999, to the effect that national and global governance must be reinvented with human development and equity at their core. With our concerted efforts, this is achievable. My delegation particularly welcomes the positive developments that are taking place in our beloved continent, Africa. As democracy blossoms, we are increasingly witnessing efforts to harness progress in human development: Africa's renaissance is no longer a slogan, but a realistic achievement for the twenty-first century.

In Malawi, we remain committed to strengthening good governance based on the principles of accountability and transparency. Attention is also given to addressing corruption and strengthening public sector administration, in particular enhancing local participation in decision-

making processes. We will continue to carry out the necessary economic and fiscal reforms.

Despite unpalatable structural adjustment conditionalities and the impact of debt servicing, the Government continues to give top priority to the provision of basic social services, particularly in education, health, water supply, community development and road infrastructure. The Poverty Alleviation Programme and the Malawi Social Action Fund seek to empower the populace so that they can contribute more positively to development. Free primary education for all was introduced by the Government to ensure that Malawian children, who hold the future of the country in their hands, are given equal opportunities to grow into productive and responsible adults.

In the health and water sectors, true to the slogan "healthy people make a healthy nation", the Government is establishing more health centres in many parts of rural Malawi: the Bakili Muluzi health initiative, which aims to bring medical services right to the people, was introduced recently. We are also making remarkable progress in bringing clean and safe water to all rural areas.

In order to respond fully to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country, the Government, in close cooperation with civil society, has embarked on highly publicized awareness campaigns which we hope will contribute to changing behavioural patterns. We appeal for more resources: additional funding for research is indeed imperative. Meanwhile, for those already afflicted, it is important for the drugs that are available now to be made more affordable for the majority of our poor.

In agriculture, the mainstay of Malawi, the priority is to achieve food self-sufficiency. In this connection, we have embarked on irrigation programmes to supplement rain-fed agricultural production.

The Malawian examples are typical of the important steps that Africa is taking, which are positive signs of renewal. Africa, however, needs the world in the same way that the world needs Africa. Africa needs a partnership, one that is shared and mutually beneficial -- a genuine partnership. We realize that the primary responsibility for African development rests with African countries themselves. It is nevertheless important for African countries to be given meaningful assistance to enable them to embark on sound economic development. The Cairo Agenda for Action adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1995 is an important blueprint for African economic development: it sets out the broad priority areas requiring specific attention. Numerous other initiatives have highlighted the need to help the development of Africa. The challenge as we approach the twenty-first century should and must be to harmonize these initiatives with a view to adopting action-oriented measures for urgent implementation.

Whatever interventions are made, it has become increasingly clear that a meaningful transformation of African economies, even after introducing all the necessary domestic, economic and market reforms, cannot be sustained without complementary improvements in trade flows, improvements in financial resource flows — whether through increased official development assistance, debt relief or forgiveness, or foreign direct investment — and support for regional cooperation. All this must be done in a conducive, secure and predictable environment. Indeed, in the globalized economy of today what happens in one part of the globe has ripple effects and impacts developments elsewhere: the Asian financial crisis and the recent sale of gold are clear examples of this phenomenon.

We must act now if we are to avert a human catastrophe in the near future. In particular, my delegation wishes to single out the imperative need for the international community to address the problem of debt. Although encouraged by the positive responses in recent months, we renew the appeal for debt forgiveness which we made in this Hall several years ago. The current ratio of external debt to gross national product, 89 per cent for my country, is causing enormous economic stress and hardship, particularly for women and children. The situation does not augur well for the future, and is having adverse effects on the Government's poverty eradication policy; also, the gains we have made politically through democratization and good governance will become meaningless without economic development.

Malawi is not alone in this predicament. Many other countries find themselves in similar conditions, where poverty is rampant and the disparities between the haves and the have-nots are widening.

One of the major issues on which people look up to the United Nations is because of its concern for national identity. It is in this spirit that Malawi reiterates its conviction that the question of participation by the Republic of China on Taiwan in the activities of the United Nations deserves consideration on the basis of respect for the principle of universality and the sovereign

equality of States. The Republic of China, a democratic country of over 21 million people, is a reality and cannot be ignored. It cannot be wished away. Malawi believes that readmission of the Republic of China to the United Nations and to all its specialized agencies would be an important factor for peace, stability and international cooperation.

No progress towards improved human development can be sustained without peace and stability. As we commemorate the centennial of the first Peace Conference at The Hague, my delegation wishes to reiterate the importance that it attaches to the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. In this connection, Malawi also welcomes the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court last year. We have already signed the Statute, and steps are under way to assure ratification without delay. We are confident that as the next century nears, the early entry into force of the Rome Statute will fortify our resolve to bring an end to impunity.

Much as the Rome Statute will go a long way in bringing to book those perpetrators of heinous crimes, it is incumbent upon us all to rid the earth of all weapons of mass destruction. The Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) next year affords us an opportunity to make greater strides in the area of nuclear disarmament. It is worth recalling the words of Albert Einstein: "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding." Indeed, peace cannot be sustained by a threat of use of force. So long as the spectre of a nuclear war exists, the world will never be at peace with itself. We urge all countries to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and those countries that have nuclear weapons to destroy them in order to finally realize general and complete disarmament and a nuclear-weapon-free world.

We also appeal to those countries that have not yet done so to become party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the anti-personnel landmines Convention. We equally enjoin current efforts to address the proliferation of small arms. In our region, this problem has assumed frightening proportions, as robberies and thefts have become more and more violent. Urgent action needs to be taken to tackle this problem resolutely. In particular, Malawi supports a moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons. We must also look for ways of stopping their flow. This Organization should prevail upon the manufacturers of these weapons to stop the illegal export of their deadly merchandise to Africa. Let them stop manufacturing and exporting these weapons to Africa. That is the bottom line. There is no point in inviting us to conferences when, under cover of darkness, the manufacturers of those small arms continue exporting them to Africa.

The biggest threat to international peace and security remains humankind. As events in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia, Rwanda, Guinea-Bissau, the Middle East, the Korean peninsula and many other parts of the globe, including, most recently, East Timor, have shown, human beings continue to be the main centre of activity where armed conflict, tensions and the quest for power exist.

As the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reminds us, "wars begin in the minds of men". Only human beings can control their own destiny. Just as those who sat at The Hague Conference 100 years ago were, we are capable of renouncing violence and of resolving all disputes through peaceful means. In this regard, we would like to welcome the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit declaration that the year 2000 will be a year of peace, security and solidarity in Africa. We remain optimistic that the Israelis and the Palestinians; the people of Western Sahara and East Timor; our brothers and sisters in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Somalia; and many others whose rights and liberties remain unprotected will finally find peace. We can together provide a conducive atmosphere for the provision of all other basic needs that have an impact on peace and security.

In the view of my delegation, the United Nations remains a singular Organization that is capable of consolidating peace and promoting sustainable human development. The relevance of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security has become even more pronounced in recent years. My delegation wishes to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for providing leadership and a renewed sense of mission to the Organization. Reform of the Organization systemwide and of its funds, programmes and specialized agencies has rekindled hopes for a secure world. Effective collaboration by all United Nations bodies, each focusing on areas of expertise, is a sure way of reaching our goals and realizing our aspirations.

The task that remains is to make the United Nations more responsive to the responsibilities ahead — the challenges of the twenty-first century. For six years now we have been talking about reform of the Security Council, but without any breakthrough. It is imperative that the Security Council be made more democratic, transparent and accountable. Representation of developing countries in the permanent category is necessary in order to ensure the continued legitimacy of, and respect for, the Council's decisions. The United Nations must be properly resourced in order for it to carry out adequately its noble activities.

Similarly, the United Nations cannot remain aloof to the requirements of civil society. Increased cooperation between the Organization and civil society, including the private sector, can only make the Organization stronger. The important role played in particular by non-governmental organizations in the adoption of the Rome Statute and the anti-personnel landmines Convention must be acknowledged and ways explored to enhance it. We believe that increased contacts between the Organization and civil society will ensure the continued relevance of the Organization in the twenty-first century.

As the Organization prepares for the Millennium Assembly next year under your leadership, the role of civil society in the consolidation of human rights, good governance and human development might be a subject that should be given in-depth consideration within the context of the overall theme of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

Finally, Malawi would like to congratulate the three new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. We welcome them to the United Nations family.

The President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas, Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): The Bahamas shares the confidence that the international community has placed in you, Sir, as the envoy of Namibia and of the continent of Africa to preside over this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the last in this twentieth century. My delegation congratulates you and pledges its full support as you guide our deliberations at this critical juncture.

My delegation's congratulations are also extended to Mr. Didier Opertti, who represented our Latin American and Caribbean region as President of the fifty-third session.

My delegation wishes to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his leadership of this highly complex Organization on which rest the hopes and aspirations of the world's peoples and which is our best prospect for a stable world.

I am pleased on this occasion to warmly welcome the Kingdom of Tonga, the Republic of Kiribati and the Republic of Nauru, the United Nations newest Member States, to this community of nations. These countries add to the growing number of small island developing States in the United Nations and underscore the need for the Organization to increase its efforts in support of this important constituency.

The United Nations was created with a mandate to work collectively for a better world, and since its inception it has contributed to positive developments in the global arena. However, significant challenges persist. The agenda of the fifty-fourth session shows that even as some progress has been made, we will continue at this session to grapple with many of the thorny issues that have preoccupied the international community over the decades. At the same time, new challenges will have to be addressed.

Recent events in Europe and elsewhere in the world, spawned by internal conflict, have raised questions as to whether States fractured by ethnic, religious and other strife could build national identities to span these divides. At the same time, they remind us that the greatest care must be taken in making exceptions to the general principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States. The Bahamas believes that this principle remains an important safeguard for international peace and security.

The Bahamas accepts that internal conflicts create situations in which the Security Council should act, in accordance with the Charter. However, we believe that whenever the United Nations responds to internal conflicts and threats to regional stability, it must do so with one and the same degree of urgency, with adequate resources and with consistency. It is with these considerations in mind that the Bahamas supports United Nations efforts to bring peace and stability to areas of conflict in all regions of the world.

Recent United Nations peace initiatives give us hope that long-standing and seemingly intractable problems may have solutions. Indeed, the Bahamas is encouraged by developments in the Middle East, particularly the

signing this month of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. We see these developments as having the potential to end decades of conflict in that troubled region. If enlightened self-interest were to prevail in long-standing conflicts elsewhere in Africa, Asia and Latin America, they too could be resolved. Global attention could then be turned towards development and human betterment, as envisaged in the Charter.

Globalization and trade liberalization are gaining currency as means of promoting accelerated development and opening opportunities to bridge the gap between rich and poor. However, concerns are being expressed that the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its dispute settlement mechanisms put the interests of the strong ahead of the interests of the weak. Indeed, the anticipated benefits of free trade give little comfort to Caribbean States and farmers dependent as they are on bananas for their foreign exchange earnings and their very livelihood. Where preferential treatment is removed before Caribbean countries can restructure their economies, severe hardship results. We therefore believe that all concerned must make an effort to find a solution to the banana problem.

We see the new round of WTO negotiations scheduled to begin in Seattle in November as an invaluable opportunity for developing countries to have their concerns incorporated into the discussions. The Bahamas is currently giving consideration to acquiring observer status in the WTO. It fully intends to follow the multilateral negotiating process and to bring its concerns to the table, particularly in the areas of trade in services and differential treatment for small economies.

Growth in the economy of the Bahamas is in part attributable to the services it offers as an offshore financial centre. The Bahamas is concerned about the action taken within the international community to inhibit or prevent the use of offshore centres and to label them, impertinently, as "harmful" tax jurisdictions. Furthermore, there is a tendency to treat all offshore jurisdictions as a homogenous group, which they are most definitely not.

The Bahamas had the opportunity to address the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on harmful tax practices in August this year in Paris. We emphasized there that strict regulations and appropriate legislation, specifically formulated to counter money laundering and other illegal activities, govern financial institutions in the Bahamas. The Bahamas is committed to working with all concerned to address these and related issues.

In May this year, it was reported to our Parliament that the economy of the Bahamas was experiencing a period of dynamism. In 1998, our economy grew some 3 per cent, the unemployment rate was 7.8 per cent and net foreign investment inflows amounted to $491 million. But on 14 September 1999, hurricane Floyd struck the Bahamas, and the entire archipelago felt its impact. Significant damage was done to the environment, infrastructure and property. The full implications for the economy of our country of the relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts have yet to be calculated.

What happened in the Bahamas underscores the continuing validity of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted in 1994. We cannot help but emphasize — as so many States did at the recently concluded twenty-second special session — how imperative it therefore remains for the Barbados Programme of Action to be implemented. It is in this context that we urge renewed commitment on the part of all to the search for consensus on the draft resolution on the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

Together with our Caribbean Community sister States, the Bahamas has made known our concern regarding the transhipment of nuclear and hazardous waste through the Caribbean Sea. Yet these shipments continue. We reiterate our wish to see these shipments stopped: they constitute the gravest risk to the fragility of our marine environment and our economies.

The significant number of reviews issued recently or expected in the coming months, of the outcomes of United Nations Conferences on small island developing States, population and development, social development and women, attest to the efforts of the United Nations to meet its economic and social obligations under the Charter. The Bahamas confidently expects that these reviews will all confirm that renewed political will and action are required to meet the goals we set, at a high level, in Barbados, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing.

Let me comment briefly on our continuing efforts to maintain the momentum for gender equality, a subject which will be taken up in the five-year Beijing review. Women worldwide continue to break through glass ceilings. In the Bahamas, for example, women have made

significant strides in Parliament, the judiciary, public service and business and service organizations. However, the Bahamas is cognizant that there are still serious challenges to women's equality. We are particularly concerned about the traffic in human beings, predominantly women and children. The Bahamas intends to continue its active support, both nationally and internationally, for efforts to help women realize their legal rights, attain economic empowerment and rise above poverty. It is our hope, therefore, that the Beijing review will result in strategies to further engage the international community in support of the world's women.

The Bahamas supports the growing consensus on human rights, which focuses on principles and values including democracy, good governance and the rule of law. We also believe that United Nations Member States should honour the human rights commitments they have made.

The Republic of Haiti is a fledgling democracy courageously facing significant political, economic and social challenges. These myriad challenges have resulted in a sustained influx of illegal immigration from Haiti into the Bahamas. Together with other illegal immigration, particularly from other countries in the Caribbean region, illegal Haitian immigration continues to be a burden to the socio-economic structures of the Bahamas. We therefore have a vested interest in the stabilization of Haiti's democratic institutions and economy. The Bahamas participated in a Caribbean Community mission to Haiti in July of this year; that mission reviewed with the Haitian Government its preparedness for elections. In so doing, we signalled our support for the process of free and fair elections in Haiti. We also fully support the efforts of the Economic and Social Council and of the General Assembly for Haiti's reconstruction and for the strengthening and furtherance of its democracy.

Last year, at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, on the world drug problem, the international community adopted a new and detailed programme of measures to enhance the effectiveness of national, regional and international drug control activities. Member States must now implement the programme, particularly by meeting the targets set in the special session's concluding documents. For the United Nations International Drug Control Programme to carry out its mandate, adequate resources must be allocated to it.

Drug trafficking into and through the Bahamas is a major threat to our socio-economic development. A significant proportion of the national budget continues to be spent on drug law enforcement. I wish to emphasize that even though we do so at the expense of vital national programmes, the Bahamas will not relent in its efforts to overcome the serious challenges posed by drug trafficking and related criminality. We are particularly concerned about the traffic in illicit firearms, which appears to be working in tandem with the drug trade. Further, with the increase in firearms comes an increase in violent crime committed with those firearms. We continue to urge greater efforts to control the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in firearms, including the ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions.

The failure to achieve general and complete disarmament means that serious threats to international peace and security persist. The production and stockpiling of chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction exacerbate this situation. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, to which the Bahamas is a party, has been a key success in recent disarmament initiatives. The Convention demonstrates what can be achieved when there is unity of purpose in the field of disarmament.

In a constantly changing global environment, United Nations reform must continue to be a priority to ensure that the Organization remains relevant to the role envisaged for it under the Charter. Negotiations on the multifaceted objective of Security Council reform have moved at a frustratingly slow pace. It is clear that the Council must be reformed, and that one of the main objectives must be its enlargement. This has the support of the Bahamas. However, in determining criteria for expanded membership of the Council, consideration must be given to a mechanism for all Members to enjoy the privilege of serving thereon.

The Bahamas welcomes the General Assembly's decision to convene a millennium summit at the beginning of the Millennium Assembly. We share the view that the summit should not be just a commemoration, but should also be substantive. The Bahamas wishes to reflect briefly on what the summit's approach might include. We see the summit not as a forum for a restatement of lofty ideals or of the practical initiatives that were the outcomes of past international conferences. The millennium summit must be used as a catalyst that would build, especially, on the outcomes of those conferences to produce a revitalized international agenda for the twenty-first century. That agenda should

take into account the accomplishments of the United Nations system as a whole in the areas of economic and social development as well as peace and security, and it should be realistic. From this last perspective, it is the continued position of the Bahamas that the question of refugees, for example, should not continue to be divorced from the broader question of illegal migration.

Under the revitalized agenda, the United Nations would have improved partnerships with other regional and international organizations. Such partnerships with organizations including the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States and the Caribbean Community would further the coordination of solutions to problems of a global nature.

The United Nations cannot do what we ask of it unless it is provided with the necessary resources. The common values we share, and our determination to find solutions to the world's problems, should give us the political will to build on what the United Nations has accomplished to date. Thus, the Organization must be assured of funding on a reliable, predictable and timely basis to carry out the mandates entrusted to it by its Member States.

The broad range of problems and issues on the United Nations agenda cannot be solved without investment in multilateralism and partnerships. It is our responsibility to make the United Nations a highly effective organization fully capable of responding to the security, political, economic and social challenges of the twenty-first century. The Bahamas pledges its full commitment to play its part in United Nations efforts to secure a better future for all.

The President: I call next on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Haiti, His Excellency Mr. Fritz Longchamp.

Mr. Longchamp (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): The Republic of Haiti finds it a source of genuine satisfaction that the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly is being presided over by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, a man for whom we have a great deal of admiration. With positive results, he has competently and responsibly served his country, Namibia, which is quite rightly considered one of the symbols of the success of our Organization. We take this opportunity to wish him every success in the tremendous and noble task he has undertaken.

We pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, who so effectively conducted the proceedings of the fifty-third session.

We also take this opportunity to convey our most sincere greetings to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, at a time when our world is facing many challenges, has known how to use his intelligence and the wisdom of his great experience to help the community of nations face up to the inevitable changes of the twenty-first century.

We also welcome, with great satisfaction, the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tanga as full-fledged Members of our Organization. They will strengthen the universal nature of the Organization and enrich its diversity of points of view.

We take the floor this 1 October, one day after the anniversary of the bloody *coup d'état* of 1991, a genuine act of assassination of democracy and of the dream of an entire people. Without the determined action of the United Nations and its Members, contemplating this sad and deadly event would have been even more painful for the people of Haiti today. We would therefore like to express once again our gratitude to the international community for having ensured the restoration of democratic constitutional order in Haiti.

Since that restoration of democracy, the Government and the people of Haiti, helped by the international community, have worked zealously to ensure an environment favourable to the blossoming of democracy and economic progress. This effort has not yet yielded the results we had hoped for, because over the last five years the Republic of Haiti has had to confront problems arising from the complexity of its situation. But through the will of our people and its Government, the Haitian dream of democracy will become a reality.

Above all, the Government of the Republic is still convinced of the critical importance of the renewal of its institutions, in particular of the Parliament, most of whose members had their term of office expire on 11 January 1999. To this end, fair, honest, democratic elections will be organized in the next few months. The head of State, Mr. René Préval, has repeatedly and solemnly affirmed his determination to create the conditions to make it possible for the elections to be organized by the Provisional Electoral Council. Of course, as guarantor of the functioning of the institutions,

the President of the Republic has considered that the most important thing is the establishment of the physical conditions necessary for well-organized elections, rather than hasty elections the results of which might be called into question because of organizational shortcomings. For President Préval, the holding of the elections must lead to a solution to our crisis and not its perpetuation, or even the creation of yet another crisis.

In order to work to consolidate its achievements, the Government hopes that a consensus will be found to continue technical assistance for professionalizing the National Police, in strict compliance with Haitian law. The Government of the Republic wants to avoid any interruption of the effort to thoroughly reform the judicial system and to promote full respect for all dimensions of human rights.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is undoubtedly a highly symbolic moment. As the last session of this century, it ought to come up with a vision that would make our Organization an essential and efficient instrument for meeting the challenges that await us in the twenty-first century. We know the contours of this vision, as they were sketched after the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Rio Earth Summit. The sketch is filled in by the ideal of the peoples of the whole world, as expressed in our Charter: to save future generations from the scourge of war, to ensure respect for fundamental human rights, to promote social progress and to establish better conditions of living in greater freedom. Thus, our task at this fifty-fourth session should be to fully work out, by means of our discussions and the work of the various committees, the concept and ways of implementing this vision.

The fifty-fourth session will also be an opportunity for the United Nations to give deeper thought to its mission of ensuring international peace and security and of promoting economic and social development. In this regard, the Republic of Haiti is happy to note that the situation in East Timor is improving following the actions of the international community and its cooperation with the Indonesian authorities. We hope that the presence of the multinational peace force will help bring the country out of the chaos into which it has been plunged. We urge the Indonesian Government and its allies in East Timor to fully respect the decision of the ballot box and to take measures to ensure East Timor's peaceful transition to independence and democracy.

The Republic of Haiti also welcomes the end of the state of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Agreement signed in Lusaka, under the aegis of President Frederick Chiluba, between the protagonists in this conflict is clear evidence that Africa is in the process of providing itself with the means to become master of its diplomatic and geographical destiny.

The Republic of Haiti calls upon India and Pakistan to do everything possible to find a permanent solution to the Kashmir conflict and to put an end to their nuclear arms race, which is indeed a frightening process that diverts tremendous financial resources and brainpower to destruction when they could be put at the service of survival and development.

Once again the Haitian Government reiterates its condemnation of all forms of terrorist activities that might cause material and human damage. We reaffirm our faith in the fundamental rights of man and in the general principles of international law as the basis of norms that govern the relations among States.

In the face of the conflicts that threaten international peace and security, it is reassuring that the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Mr. Federico Mayor, has had the idea of promoting throughout the world the culture of peace, which is so vital to good relations within and between nations. The promotion of a genuine culture of peace is inseparable from the democratization of the international order. One of the fundamental aspects of this democratization lies in the solution to the question of equitable representation in the Security Council. It is time for this Assembly to reach a consensus on this subject of such crucial importance for the future of our Organization.

An equally important point for establishing a genuine culture of peace is the implementation of United Nations resolutions in the realm of international security. Many resolutions have not been implemented when their implementation would be decisive, not only in the context of North-South relations, but also in the context of the indispensable relationships to be developed between States, international institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Over the last two months, the Government and the people of Haiti have observed with sadness and helplessness the destruction wreaked and the terrible toll taken by the natural disasters that have struck Turkey,

Taiwan, Greece, the Bahamas and the United States. We wish to reiterate to the people of these countries that we share their pain and offer our heartfelt solidarity, having ourselves, unfortunately, experienced such disasters.

We take this opportunity to repeat that the Haitian Government is following attentively the evolution of relations between the two countries on the Taiwan Strait. Our Government notes with satisfaction that the two sides are undertaking measures to establish a climate of confidence, respect and prosperity, which will be of the utmost benefit to the peoples who live there.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the fight for the elimination of poverty remains one of the most noble tasks of the United Nations system, in order to establish, as we are bidden by our Charter, better living conditions for the human beings living on this earth.

President Gurirab recently echoed the feelings of the vast majority of developing countries when he noted that globalization might open the floodgates of competition in such a way that certain States would be wiped off the map. Therefore it is up to the United Nations and to each country to examine attentively the means of remedying the ill effects of globalization on the social and economic structures of every country — and particularly its effects on small developing countries. Certainly globalization has its positive side, bringing human communities closer together politically, socially and culturally. But it must not be used as a pretext for a standardization that might neutralize the diversity that is the very strength of humanity.

On the eve of the third millennium what should unite us more than ever, beyond our differences and often highly divergent interests, is the laying down of foundations to bring about the security of all and the elimination of poverty as the initial phase of a planetary process of true sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo, Mr. Joseph Kokou Koffigoh.

Mr. Koffigoh (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to join those who spoke before me in expressing my warmest congratulations to the President on his election to lead this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This choice reflects the great esteem in which the international community holds his country, Namibia, as well as being a tribute to his past as a freedom fighter and to his qualities as a statesman. I assure him of the wholehearted support of my delegation as he carries out his duties.

I would also like to extend my most sincere congratulations to President Gurirab's predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, for the skill with which he conducted the work of the fifty-third session of the Assembly.

To Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to express the utmost appreciation of the Government of Togo for the perspicacity and tenacity he has shown in seeking solutions to the many problems facing the Organization.

Finally, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to warmly congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission into this great family, the United Nations.

We have met once again this year to take stock of actions carried out in pursuit of our common objectives and to coordinate our views on what actions to take in order to address today's challenges. Given the current state of the world, we must acknowledge that, despite the significant progress that has been made, the world is still marked, unfortunately, by instability, raging wars and tensions that are most often due to widespread poverty and to the uneven distribution of resources, as well as to the legitimate aspiration of peoples for greater freedom, justice and well-being.

Indeed, at a time when mankind is getting ready to embark on the third millennium, our world offers one of the bleakest pictures in its history from an economic and social point of view. All kinds of problems linked to underdevelopment, poverty and inequalities between developed and disadvantaged countries — problems long denounced in this and other forums — have worsened in recent years as a result of the globalization of the economy. Although developed countries have benefited from this phenomenon, especially in the areas of trade and investment, developing countries are suffering the negative impact of globalization on their economies, which have already been rendered fragile by their unbearable debt burden, the plummeting of prices for raw materials and the steady decline in official development assistance.

As regards the external-debt problem in particular, we can never stress enough how the accumulation of this

debt hampers development efforts. The awareness of the extent of this problem and of its impact on development is such that the most industrialized countries and the Bretton Woods institutions and those of the United Nations system now acknowledge that most of the developing countries' debt can never be repaid. They also acknowledge quite openly that the debt burden is the major obstacle to the development of poor countries and that the mechanisms that have been established to resolve the debt crisis have not been very effective.

Within this context we can only welcome the commitment of the G-8 summit, held last June in Cologne, to cancel a portion of the debt of world's poorest countries. My delegation encourages the international community to continue to take bold steps aimed at resolving the debt problem in an effective and lasting manner. These steps might include the cancellation of all of the bilateral debt of the poorest countries, a significant reduction of the debt burden of middle-income and low-income countries, and increasing the flexibility of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative so as to make its benefits more generally available. However, we should point out that the implementation of such measures should not be carried out to the detriment of official development assistance, which, unfortunately, continues to decline.

As regards trade, it is generally acknowledged that the expansion of international trade is a true engine for growth and development. We would like to see the international community take appropriate measures to integrate developing countries into the international-trade regime, through increasing access for their exports to the markets of developed countries, by supporting the diversification and strengthening of developing countries' production capacities, and by improving terms of trade.

We sincerely hope that the forthcoming negotiations at the World Trade Organization, the tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries will take into account the interests of the weakest partners.

In recent years, many initiatives have been taken on the bilateral and multilateral levels to try to address the challenges faced by the African continent. In this respect, I would cite the United States initiative for a Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa and the Tokyo International Conferences on African Development. While this may be satisfying, there is still reason, in the name of efficiency, to call for some degree of coordination between these initiatives and those of the United Nations system.

Efforts to promote development and eradicate poverty in Africa cannot be dissociated from our daily struggle to safeguard peace and security. For our countries again this year, preserving and consolidating a climate of peace and stability have been the major imperative, given the many real dangers.

Thus, the Government of Togo, traditionally inclined to search for peace and stability, has spared no effort to try to reconcile points of view whenever discord arises, convinced that dialogue and cooperation should be emphasized in the settlement of disputes and that any conflict that may arise in any country of a subregion represents a tragedy for the entire subregion, and perhaps Africa as a whole.

Inspired by the spirit of subregional solidarity that, under the President of our Republic, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadéma, current Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we have carried out actions and taken appropriate initiatives to find negotiated solutions to the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, the conflict in Sierra Leone and the border dispute between Guinea and Liberia.

Following the crisis that erupted in Guinea-Bissau in June 1998, the efforts of the ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries led to the signing of a ceasefire and a peace Agreement in November 1998. The subsequent deployment of an ECOWAS Monitoring Group contingent with woefully inadequate means did not allow us effectively to implement the provisions of the Abuja Agreement and the Lomé Protocol, nor did it entirely allay tensions. Despite the brutal upheaval of the peace process on 7 May 1999, the Security Council ratified the Secretary-General's proposal to maintain the United Nations office in Guinea-Bissau with a new mandate. We hope that the Organization and the international community will continue to provide the necessary assistance to the people of Guinea-Bissau, who so desperately need it. We welcome the commitments undertaken that will ensure respect for the elections of November 1997. We expect that tranquility and security will return to Guinea-Bissau.

In Sierra Leone, thanks to the initiative and determination of the ECOWAS heads of State and to the support of the international community, the Government

of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front signed, in our capital city of Lomé on 7 July 1999, a Peace Agreement whose implementation will, we hope, allow the people of Sierra Leone to embark decisively on the path of national reconciliation, stability and reconstruction. Thus, as I pointed out yesterday before the Security Council in the context of the open debate on the situation in Africa, the restoration is closely linked to the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement.

That is why I am pleased by the Secretary-General's proposal in his latest report on Sierra Leone to create a United Nations force of 6,000 in that country, in keeping with this Agreement. I am convinced that the Security Council, which has already begun to consider the matter, will authorize as soon as possible the deployment of that force, which, in compliance with its mandate, will help the Government of Sierra Leone to implement the stalled disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

We also wish particularly to thank the Government of the United Kingdom, which chairs the international contact group on Sierra Leone; the international organizations and humanitarian agencies; and all those who have variously contributed to restoring peace in that country. I recall the fine spirit of solidarity that was manifest during the negotiations on the Lomé Peace Agreement, which allowed the representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, as well as the permanent representatives of the United Nations and the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Sierra Leone to pool their efforts around the seven-member ECOWAS contact group, which worked tirelessly day and night for success in Sierra Leone. That is why we feel that the decision to embark as soon as possible on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme with the dispatch of 6,000 United Nations blue helmets would put an end to this war.

As for Liberia, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of ECOWAS met on 26 August 1999 in Lomé to study the destabilization of that brotherly country. My delegation makes an urgent appeal to the parties involved to respect the relevant provisions of the ECOWAS Treaty and the non-aggression protocol signed in Lagos on 22 April 1998 in order to allow the immediate restoration of a climate of peace, security and confidence in the subregion. In this respect, we were pleased by the recent signing in Abuja, on 16 September, of the understanding between the heads of State of Guinea and Liberia during the ECOWAS mini-summit, held in the capital of Nigeria. We also appeal to the international community to provide the necessary support to countries of the subregion that have borne the burden of refugees, Guinea-Bissau in particular, so that they may address that problem.

Elsewhere, the perpetuation of armed conflicts, with their humanitarian consequences of all kinds, deeply concerns my delegation. In this respect, we welcome the signing in Lusaka on 12 July of the Ceasefire Agreement between the main parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ardently call for a stronger commitment of the Security Council to assist the Southern African Development Community countries.

In Angola, we hope that the joint efforts of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity will allow the people of that country to achieve reconciliation and will encourage the restoration of peace and stability in that country. In any case, Togo is determined to apply the decisions of our United Nations with respect to the steps taken against the belligerent parties in Angola.

As to the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, my delegation sincerely hopes that these two brotherly countries will truly embark on the path towards a peaceful solution of their dispute.

It is comforting to note that real progress has been made with regard to the crisis stemming from the Lockerbie affair after many years of procrastination which penalized the fraternal people of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. The Government of Togo believes that in placing the two Lockerbie bombing suspects at the disposal of the United Nations, Libya has met its obligations under Security Council resolutions and that the Security Council must immediately lift the sanctions imposed on that country. This will contribute to ending the suffering of our Libyan brothers, which has lasted too long.

With regard to the Middle East, we reaffirm our strong conviction that an era of lasting peace, stability and security for all can come about only through the continuation of the peace process and the most resolute political will on all sides, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of "land for peace". In this context, the Government of Togo welcomes developments in that region, through steps recently taken by President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. We urge the

parties concerned to continue to work tirelessly to find ways and means to allow the harmonious continuation of the peace process.

One of the most important events that will have most deeply marked this fading century is undeniably the end of the cold war. Among other things, it resulted in averting the spectre of a nuclear holocaust; at least, we hope so.

Deeply attached to the principle of general and complete disarmament under effective international control, Togo is still concerned about nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction. This is why we appeal for continued efforts to put an end to the proliferation of nuclear arms and the threats they entail.

The same applies to proliferation of and illicit trafficking in light weapons and small arms in Africa. My country welcomes United Nations initiatives to curtail and contain this phenomenon, and hopes that the international conference decided upon by the General Assembly in resolution 53/77 E of 4 December 1998, and scheduled to take place in Geneva in 2001, will make it possible to find effective solutions to this problem.

I would also like to stress the role played in this context by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, which organized in Lomé, from 2 to 4 August 1999, a workshop on illicit trafficking in light weapons. I am pleased to take this opportunity to pay a well deserved tribute to the Secretary-General of our Organization, who has just provided this Centre with a Director, whose main task it is to revitalize its activities and mobilize the necessary funds to finance its operational expenses. Because of its important role in implementing the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development, as well as in the destruction of arms collected during the peace process in Liberia, we feel that support for its work is urgently needed. In this connection, we thank the Italian, Japanese, Norwegian and Swedish Governments for their generous voluntary contributions and reiterate our appeal to the international community to provide financial and logistical support.

I turn to the functioning of our Organization. Here I stress the fundamental role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security. My delegation reaffirms its support for all reforms to strengthen the effectiveness of the Council and provide representation for Africa, in the form of a permanent Member, in keeping with the will of the heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity.

Throughout its long history, my country has never strayed from the purposes of our Organization. We have often expressed and shown our dedication to the ideals of peace and justice, as well as the principles of democracy and the protection of human rights. Going beyond the social and political crises that we have known in recent years, the people of Togo are resolutely engaged in a new process of national understanding and harmony, something I wish to emphasize. On 19 July 1999, on the initiative of General Eyadema, President of the Republic, an internal dialogue bringing together all of the political actors of the country was organized following preliminary meetings held at Paris and Lomé between March and June 1999.

The opportunity was given to representatives of the presidential leadership and of the Togolese opposition to freely express themselves on the major issues of political life in our country, under the arbitration of international facilitators. In this regard, I would like to renew our deepest gratitude to France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the European Union and the International Organization of La Francophonie for the important role they played during these negotiations, which led to the signing of a framework agreement on 29 July 1999. For the implementation of the agreement, the Government has shown itself ready to make all necessary concessions that are in the national interest, it being understood that national reconciliation is vital to the continuation of the process of democratization and the consolidation of the rule of law in Togo, as elsewhere.

We are sure that reason and the national interest will prevail, so that the hopes of the people of Togo and the international community are not disappointed.

The Government regards the signing of the agreement as an important step in our resolute march towards building a democratic society and bringing about development. We therefore solemnly appeal to the international community to resume effective cooperation with Togo, in order to allow its population to enjoy the fruits of democratization. Poverty is the enemy of democracy.

The complexity of the issues and the many challenges to be taken up at the dawn of the third millennium call for a strengthening of international cooperation and, above all, greater solidarity with Africa. No nation, no country, whatever its resources and abilities, can tackle these challenges alone. Cooperation between the peoples of the United Nations is vital to us.

We must therefore act together, consolidating our solidarity within the framework of our Organization, which, after half a century of existence, has proved that it is an irreplaceable tool at the service of mankind.

Togo, which once again proclaims its faith in the United Nations, would encourage it to relentlessly pursue in the century to come the achievement of its Charter purposes.

May this session strengthen us in our common struggle to consolidate peace, justice, freedom and progress in the world and foster more understanding between nations. Togo is ready to contribute to this effort.

The Acting President (*spoke in English*): I call on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Grenada, His Excellency The Hon. Mark Isaac.

Mr. Isaac (Grenada): My delegation is delighted to congratulate the President on his election. My delegation's hearty congratulations are made even warmer as he has the privilege and the honour to take the fifty-fourth session, as President of the General Assembly, from the twentieth into the twenty-first century. A similar unique place in history will not be observed for another hundred years. We are confident, in view of his past heroic leadership of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and now as the Foreign Minister of Namibia, he will conduct our deliberations with vision and dynamism.

My delegation also wishes to express our grateful appreciation to Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay for his skilful and productive conduct of the proceedings of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

My delegation welcomes to the family of nations the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga and offers hearty congratulations.

As the curtain makes its slow descent upon the twentieth century, bringing it to its inevitable close, there is a prevailing mood of reflection and anticipation. Rightly so, as a connection between past, present and future is being made, for we cannot appreciate the present without knowledge of the past if we hope to ensure the future. And indeed, historically speaking, the past is never past, for what is past is prologue.

In retrospect, for some developing countries the period of the 1980s was considered a lost decade because of the heavy burden of debt servicing, falling commodity prices, negative economic growth, unemployment and structural adjustment. In the 1990s, the catchwords seemed to be "sustainable development", "environmentally friendly", "good governance", "globalization", and "poverty alleviation". These phrases seem to be the legacy of the cluster of United Nations summits of the 1990s: the Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, on Human Rights in 1993, on Small Island Developing States in 1994, on Population and Development in 1994, on Social Development in 1995, on Women in 1995, on Human Settlements in 1996 and on Food Security in 1996. In all these high-level meetings, the centrality of the human person in sustainable social, economic, and cultural development was emphasized.

Grenada believes that the concept of sustainable development is shared responsibility on the part of developed and developing countries. Its global character must be recognized so that there can be more sharing of knowledge, ideas, information and resources. Consequently, the region from which I come, the Caribbean, strongly urges our more developed partners urgently to make available new and additional sources of funding and technological transfer to enable us to comply with the obligations the international Conventions demand of us. In short, the concepts of the global village and globalization should be premised on giving, caring and sharing.

Sustainable development is not possible without respect for the whole range of human rights — economic, social, cultural, civil and political. Indeed, human rights are meaningless in an environment of poverty and deprivation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, has said, aptly, that perhaps the largest scale of human rights violations today is the fact that one fifth of humanity lives in absolute poverty. World Bank estimates reveal that over 35 per cent of people in the Caribbean basin live below the poverty line. This situation threatens the very existence of civil societies there.

Moreover, the plight of certain small Caribbean States is further compounded by the World Trade Organization's inhumane rulings over the European Union banana regime. We are still baffled over the attitude of our traditional ally and certain friendly Latin American countries over the modified version of the banana regime. We are hopeful, though, that a satisfactory compromise will be arrived at soon. If so, the economies of the small, banana-producing countries

would be saved from the shocks of a banana industry become non-existent.

I stress that there is an urgent need to unite our efforts in a common framework to alleviate the problems associated with critical poverty in order to restore some form of human dignity in our countries.

To the observer with no inside knowledge of the working of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the series of meetings to review what has already been reviewed, and perhaps in some cases already implemented, seem as complex as quantum physics and exercises in repetitive and confusing rhetoric. Nevertheless, since the conceptual and structural framework of sustainable development is shared responsibility, my delegation is hopeful that the recently-ended special session to review the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States has given some impetus to the creation of this global partnership we all desire. We are equally hopeful that the project proposals submitted by Grenada will be favourably considered and appropriate funding made available to execute them.

The Caribbean Sea is a unique body of water bordering a large number of States, with overlapping exclusive economic zones, vulnerable to the elements of nature and also to man-made disasters. The Caribbean Sea is indisputably the lifeblood of the countries of the Caribbean Community — one half of whose population lives on the coastline, where 20 per cent of the regional gross domestic product is produced — and provides employment for more than 25 per cent of the labour force in tourism and the fishing industry. Sustainable management and development of the Caribbean Sea and its resources would benefit not only the Caribbean people but also the international community as a whole.

Moreover, recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area within the context of sustainable development would provide the jurisdictional authority necessary to control the passage of ships carrying toxic and hazardous wastes and chemical and radioactive materials in Caribbean waters. My delegation urges this special recognition of the Caribbean Sea for all of the reasons I have stated.

We are mindful that we do not own the Earth; we are simply holding it in trust for succeeding generations. We are admonished not to treat the land with contempt and remember that from it we came and to it we shall return.

Grenada is absolutely clear about its commitment to the principles of the United Nations and therefore reveres the ideals which informed those principles. Grenada thus places a premium on fairness and justice in the conduct of international affairs. It is in this context that the Government of Grenada wishes to request that a fresh look be taken at United Nations General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 1971, as a matter of simple justice and fairness to the people of the Republic of China. This humanitarian-minded and democratically inclined country has used its hard-earned resources to help developing countries to help themselves, by providing training, expertise and capital for developmental projects and other forms of technical assistance in several critical areas. The noble efforts of the Republic of China reminds one of the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius, and his thoughts on giving a man a fish and teaching a man to fish. Grenada applauds the sacrifices of the Republic of China in this regard.

Indeed, the Republic of China has wrought an economic miracle, to the point where it is the fourteenth most important trading country and its foreign reserves rank among the top in the world.

The international community cannot simply ignore the aspirations of such a dynamic and generous people, and should thus ensure that the fundamental right of the 22 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan to participate in the activities of the United Nations be fully respected.

Equally, in the name of humanity and justice, Grenada calls for the lifting of the economic embargo against the Republic of Cuba. World opinion is definitely swayed towards this, and consequently overwhelming support is given year after year to the relevant resolutions at the United Nations on this issue. Sadly, though, enforcement is still outstanding. As we are about to close another chapter in the history of mankind, we appeal to the Government of the United States of America to once more take the lead in showing its humane qualities and ease the pain and suffering of ordinary Cubans. It should therefore suspend all sanctions unconditionally.

As we look to the new century we must urge that there be a Middle East of peaceful coexistence, particularly between Israel and the Palestinians.

We certainly hope that past events in the Balkans — particularly in Yugoslavia — will not be repeated; and that the principle of self-determination will be respected

globally, the situation in East Timor being a case in point; that the various pockets of conflict around the world will be resolved amicably; and that any changes contemplated within the United Nations system will take into account the concerns and aspirations of smaller nations.

Grenada believes that, with the collective efforts of all States and the purposeful involvement of the United Nations, democracy, social justice, good governance, solidarity and the economic prosperity of all our Members could be achieved.

Finally, my country extends its concern and sympathy to the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and, more recently, to our friends in the Republic of China on Taiwan, a country so helpful to us in the promotion of sustainable development.

We are also mindful of the situation in East Timor and hope that as soon as order and security are restored, independence, for which the majority voted, will take root.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.